

The Reaching Agents of Change (RAC) Project in Tanzania (2011-2014)

RAC has strengthened the capacity of Sokoine University of Agriculture (SUA) as well as that of 15 national facilitators to conduct training of trainers (ToT) courses on sweetpotato. A total of 76 secondary trainers and 2,899 tertiary trainers and farmers have been trained.

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Dr. Anna Temu (left) with ToT participants during an OFSP value addition practical session at Sokoine University of Agriculture (credit: G. Mulongo)

Background:

Sweetpotato, widely grown throughout Tanzania is an extremely significant food crop. It is particularly important in the densely-populated Lake Victoria Zone and Eastern Zone and is considered a classic food security crop. According to FAOSTAT, from 2007 to 2011, sweetpotato production in Tanzania ranked second in the East African Community (EAC) region and seventh in the world. In terms of aggregate national production in Tanzania, sweetpotato ranked 5th after rice, cassava, maize and banana. An estimated 39% of Tanzanians are malnourished and 44% of children under five years of age are stunted. An estimated 600,000 children under the age of five died over the past decade as a result of inadequate nutrition. Vitamin A is micronutrient that helps young children grow and develop normally and stay healthy. In Tanzania, vitamin A deficiency (VAD) remains a widespread problem.

The orange-fleshed sweetpotato (OFSP) is a vitamin A powerhouse that can address the high

percentage of vitamin A deficiency in Tanzania, especially among young children under the age of five and women of reproductive age. In addition, OFSP contributes significant amounts of vitamins C, E, K and several B vitamins. Leaves also have good micronutrient contents and adequate protein (4%) for use as food and animal feed. OFSP can thus be used to cost-effectively improve nutrition, empower women, and increase income earning opportunities, even for the poorest households. Its short maturing period (3-5 months), ability to grow under marginal conditions and flexible planting and harvest times are also driving its expansion. Despite these comparative production advantages, there are still many challenges such as drought, floods, low production and consumption of sweetpotatoes. Other challenges include infrastructural and behavior and attitude factors with a perception that sweetpotato is a crop cultivated by women.

The Reaching Agents of Change (RAC) project (2011-2014) was a unique initiative that advocated for increased investment in OFSP to combat VAD among young children and women of reproductive age. RAC worked towards strengthening advocacy and technical capacity for successful nutrition interventions using OFSP in Mozambique, Tanzania, Nigeria and to a lesser extent in Ghana and Burkina Faso. The project was implemented by the International Potato Center (CIP) and Helen Keller International (HKI) in partnership with national institutions. At the start of the project, OFSP had been introduced in Tanzania in the Lake Zone and Eastern Zone and five varieties were being grown. These areas became points for primary seed multiplication for RAC. Two OFSP varieties (Mataya and Kiegea) were already officially released. The remaining three varieties, Ejumula, Jewel, and Kabode were in trials for future release.

What we wanted to achieve?

The RAC project in Tanzania has been working towards generating new investments to scale up adoption of OFSP as a tool to combat VAD among young children and women of reproductive age.





PE introducing the participants at a Media Event in Tanzania (credit M.Tuinsma)

Tanzania was expected to advocate to governments, the private sector, donors and NGOs to achieve new investments totaling at least USD 6 million for OFSP activities in three years. The project worked towards influencing policy and ensuring OFSP was integrated into strategies, policies and plans that address food insecurity and malnutrition in the country. The advocacy activities began by carrying out a situation analysis in 2011. A desk review of existing literature and policies and guidelines in agriculture, health, nutrition and related fields was carried out to identify opportunities for promoting OFSP. Three zones in the country were identified as key target areas for the project: the Lake Zone, a key area for sweetpotato production where OFSP programs were ongoing, and the Eastern and Central Zones, which are major production areas.

RAC has also been working towards building the capacity of national implementing agencies to design and implement technically strong, gender-sensitive and cost-effective programmes that drive uptake of OFSP. The foundation of this effort was the establishment of a 10-day training of trainers (ToT) course on "Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Sweetpotato" in collaboration with Sokoine University of Agriculture (SUA) and out a 6-day learning workshop titled "Engendered Orange-fleshed Sweetpotato Project Planning, Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation." RAC activities on capacity building in Tanzania commenced with the identification and strengthening of a national implementing agency to design and implement technically strong, gender-sensitive and cost-effective programmes that drive uptake of OFSP.



What have we achieved?

Advocacy for generation of new investments and policy change:

1. RAC has built a cadre of 20 OFSP advocates to help generate new investments and influence leaders and policy makers in agriculture, nutrition, and health sectors to implement the advocacy strategy and accelerate adoption of OFSP as a means to combat vitamin A deficiency and improve food security. Advocates selected include key personnel in media, central and

local Government, private sector and NGOs.

2. The 6-day Project Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Learning Event was held at the Eastern and Southern Africa Management Institute (ESAMI), Arusha, Tanzania, from 21-27 March, 2013.
3. The RAC project in Tanzania recorded investments amounting to over USD 1 million, with 11% of these investments coming from local government. In addition, proposals worth approximately USD 6 million have been developed by partners and submitted to various donors. A significant proportion of these proposals were developed by participants who attended the 6-day learning event on "Engendered Orange-fleshed Sweetpotato Project Planning, Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation."
4. Advocacy efforts by the RAC team in Tanzania influenced the inclusion of "micronutrient rich crops" as an approved intervention in the draft National Agriculture Policy. Moreover:
 - OFSP has been incorporated into the Agricultural Sector Development Plan (ASDP II), the framework for agriculture development in the country
 - Proposals were made to include OFSP into the National Food Security Policy that is currently under review
 - Biofortification was included in the draft National Nutrition Strategy Implementation Plan, with specific mention of OFSP in the draft National Nutrition Strategy Implementation Plan.
5. OFSP was featured prominently in four national events, including National Agricultural Fairs (2012, 2013 and 2014), and the National Exhibition on OFSP held on 17th July 2013 in Dar es Salaam. Moreover, the media advocate from Star TV developed and nationally aired three TV documentaries on OFSP, using the station's own resources. A total of five mainstream print media and five online media platforms featured stories on OFSP.
6. The capacity of the training partner, Sokoine University of Agriculture (SUA) as well as that of 15 national facilitators has been built. Three 10-day ToT training courses were conducted between 2012 and 2014 in partnership with SUA, and 76 (29 female) secondary trainers have been trained. SUA is committed to continue holding the course after the project ends.
7. Some of the graduates of the 10-day ToT courses have carried out 18 step-down courses and trained a total of 2,899 (1,503 female) tertiary trainers and farmers.
8. RAC has established a total of 3.5 ha of disease-free primary and 12.6 ha of secondary seed multiplication plots over the three years. About 1,155 households have so far received OFSP vines in Tanzania.
9. RAC worked towards developing a seed system that would enable 200,000 direct and 400,000 indirect households to obtain OFSP during the 5 year period after the RAC project ends.